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A Tribute to H. P. Lovecraft

Introducing:
Mike Mignola's
DR. GOSBURO COFFIN™

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the BOOK ROOM HORROR
Introducing DR. GOSBURO COFFIN
WHISTLER, MASSACHUSETTS. 1899.
HERE IS WHERE IT HAPPENED, AND THERE...
...THE POOR WRETCH IT HAPPENED TO, JOHN LESLIE HORN.
DON'T LIKE THE LOOK OF HIM.
HE WAS A BAD SORT?
NOT BORN BAD.
BY ALL ACCOUNTS HE WAS ACTUALLY A VERY PROMISING YOUNG MAN, MIGHT HAVE MADE A GOOD, HONEST NAME FOR HIMSELF, BUT HE FELL IN WITH A BAD CROWD...WITCHES AND NECRO-PHILES...
HE DEVOTED HIMSELF TO THE BLACK ARTS, BECAME OBSESSED WITH ACQUIRING A CERTAIN RARE AND HORRIBLE OLD BOOK...

"I SHUDDER TO THINK THE PRICE HE MUST HAVE PAID FOR THE THING.
"HE RECEIVED IT HERE IN THIS ROOM...
"...AND HERE, FOR NINE DAYS, HE READ IT.
"ON THE TENTH DAY HE STAGGERED UP THE STEPS OF ST. AGNES' CHURCH.
"WITNESSES SAID THERE WERE STRANGE SYMBOLS CARVED INTO HIS SKIN.
"AS HE STEPPED INTO THE CHURCH HE WHISPERED SOMETHING..."
SAVE ME.
"THEN HE VANISHED, LEAVING ONLY A BAD SMELL AND A SCORCH MARK ON THE FLOOR."
HE WASN'T BORN BAD, BUT HE ENDED BAD.
HUM.
NOW I SUPPOSE HE HAUNTS THIS ROOM -- ALL BURNT BONES AND GREASY EYEBALLS. BLOODY-RED MOUTH. SHARP TEETH. LONG, TWISTY FINGERS WITH CRUEL, HOOKED TALONS--
WELL, I DON'T THINK IT'S AS BAD AS THAT...

"THE GHOST OF JOHN HORN APPEARS ONE NIGHT A YEAR, THIS NIGHT, THE ANNIVERSARY OF HIS DISINTEGRATION. IT'S TWENTY YEARS NOW SINCE IT HAPPENED...
"OWNERS, GUESTS, SERVANTS--THEY'VE ALL SEEN HIM IN THIS ROOM, BUT NO ONE HAS DARED CONFRONT HIM. YOU AND I WILL DO THAT...
"I HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS IN HERE. THE ATMOSPHERE IS STILL CHARGED WITH A KIND OF... POISON...
"THERE MAY BE SOME DANGER..."
STIR YOURSELF, ALBERT. STIR YOUR...
ZZZZZZZ
!
JOHN HORN...
NNNN

EVEN IN DEATH YOU'RE STILL ATTACHED TO THAT EVIL BOOK.
GET RID OF THE THING IF YOU CAN, HORN.
LOSE IT IN SOME DARK CORNER OF GHOST-LAND...
...BUT DON'T GIVE IT TO ME.
TAKE IT AWAY, HORN.
I DO NOT WANT IT. I WILL NOT LOOK AT IT.
TAKE IT AWAY, I TELL YOU!
I WILL NOT...
I...
I...

GOD HELP ME! I'M INSIDE THE DAMN BOOK!
CURSE MY OWN HEAD!
I LOOKED TOO CLOSELY AT THE AWFUL THING...
NOW IT'S GOT A HOLD OF ME!
DOCTOR... DO NOT SHUT YOURSELF OFF FROM THE WISDOM CONTAINED HEREIN...

... FOR HERE IS WISDOM OLDER THAN PLANETS.
I WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.
IS THAT TRUE?
DOCTOR, AREN'T YOU YOURSELF A STUDENT OF THE OCCULT?
I AM...
BUT I AM A STUDENT SO THAT I MAY BETTER RECOGNIZE MY ENEMY.
AND MY KNOWLEDGE IS MY WEAPON AGAINST THE DARK FORCES ABROAD IN THE WORLD...
...THOSE SAME DARK FORCES YOU'VE GIVEN YOURSELF OVER TO.
LOOK WHAT GOOD IT'S DONE YOU.
IT HAS DONE ME SOME GOOD...
...LET ME SHOW YOU...

MEANWHILE, OUTSIDE THE BOOK.
ZZZZZ
HUH? WHAT?
I DON'T LIKE THE LOOK OF THAT!
OPEN YOUR EYES, DOCTOR...
I WON'T.
"THEN I WILL BITE THEM OUT OF YOUR SKULL."
STAB!
AHHHHHHHH

OW.
PARDON ME, DOCTOR...
...BUT I THOUGHT SUDDEN, DECISIVE ACTION MIGHT BE CALLED FOR.
WELL, NOT MUCH HARM DONE.
YOUR INSTINCTS AT LEAST ARE GOOD.
I WAS IN A TIGHT SPOT THERE FOR A MOMENT.
IF EVER THERE WAS A BOOK THAT WANTED BURNING...
AND THE BOOK...?
RIIIIGHT.
NOOOO...
DID YOU HEAR SOMETHING?
MAYBE THE WIND WHISTLING THROUGH A DEAD SINNER'S EMPTY GRAVE.
COULD HAVE BEEN THAT.
THE END

The DEVIL'S FOOTPRINTS

THE BELLS AT ST. JOHN'S AND THE UNITARIAN CHURCH STRIKE 2 A.M. IN CHORUS THROUGH THE THICK NIGHT AIR, AND DEIRDRE MILLER WHISPERS THAT WE'VE COME TO THE ADDRESS.

A TWENTY-YEAR-OLD RUMOR ABOUT A COPY OF *THE MYSTERIES OF THE WORM* DROVE ME TO ENLIST THIS *SELF-PROCLAIMED PSYCHIC* IN PROVIDENCE TO TRACK IT DOWN.

SHE FELT THAT SOME SPELL HID THE BOOK FROM "SENSITIVES" SUCH AS HERSELF.

I SUGGESTED INTERVIEWING LOCAL BOOKSELLERS, WHICH LED HER TO THE CURRENT OWNER.

PUT THAT OUT, MRS. MILLER.

SHE'S AN OLD LADY WITH AN *EYE PATCH*. SHE'S ONLY BEEN IN PROVIDENCE A YEAR.

SHE CALLS HERSELF *MRS. RUSSIA*, BUT I THINK THAT'S JUST WHERE SHE'S *FROM*, NOT HER *NAME*.

THE OLD WOMAN'S SUSPICIOUS REPUTATION FORCED ME TO DRIVE DOWN FROM BOSTON, TO EXECUTE THIS FINAL MODE OF INQUIRY MYSELF.

VAOL, SCHOEL, AND YOD HEH HEH, OPEN THIS--

MR. WAITE, SSH.

SCRITCH SCRITCH

WORM SONG

ALLIE & SHOWMAN

"*SELF-PROCLAIMED* PSYCHIC," AM I ?

KNOWING I'D RETURN TO BOSTON AS SOON AS I HAD THE BOOK -- ONE OF THE MOST OMINOUS GRIMOIRES OF OLD EUROPE -- MRS. MILLER INSISTED ON ACCOMPANYING ME TO THE HOUSE.
I DIDN'T WASTE TIME ARGUING.
VERY WELL. LEAD ON.
...RUSSIAN...?
IT'S IN HERE, I'M SURE OF IT...
DON'T LET THE LACK OF BOOKSHELVES DISCOURAGE YOU.

HM.
MR. WAITE, DON'T. YOU'LL--
CLIK
CLUNK
HOW'D YOU KNOW IT WOULDN'T PLAY ?
THERE'S NO STOOL IN FRONT OF IT, NO MOVEABLE CHAIR IN THE WHOLE ROOM--
De Vermis Mysteriis
L. Prinn
-- AND ...
.... AND I'D BETTER SIT... DOWN...
THAT'S THE REAL ONE, ISN'T IT ?
I BELIEVE SO, MRS. MILLER.
MY GOD... THIS PAGE GIVES AN INVOCATION FOR--
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

WHO ARE YOU?
WHAT ARE YOUR NAMES !?
MRS. DEIRDRE--
MR. AND MRS. JAMES FASSBENDER.
HA!
KAÄP, FOSSBINDER !
I THOUGHT SO--
--KAÄP, RUSCHA !

RUSCHA, THE LEGENDARY DANISH WITCH, WHO WITH ONE MAGIC WORD AND THE RIGHT NAME COULD FREEZE ANY FOE IN HIS TRACKS.
IN INOMINATŌ TIBI MAGNI, SADOQUAE STELLARUM NIGERUM ET BUFANIFORMIS SIGILLATUM ...
THE TEMPERATURE DROPS AS I QUICKLY RECITE THE INVOCATION, GUARDING MYSELF WITH THE MANO CORNUTO, AND RUSCHA LISTENS, FROZEN BY HER OWN SIMPLE HEX.
HER HUSBAND, A YOUNG KING, TURNED THE WORD ON HER, GIVING HER A TASTE OF HER OWN MEDICINE WITH A SWORD ACROSS HER FACE.
THE OLD SCAR OPENS AS SHE WRITHES SILENTLY IN THE GRIP OF SOMETHING WHICH NEVER MADE IT INTO THOSE BRIGHT, HEROIC NORSE MYTHS...

...BUT WHICH MAKES ITSELF SUDDENLY SEEN NOW.
TINY MOUTHS OPEN ALL ALONG THE BLOATED TENTACLE, ANXIOUS TONGUES LAPPING AT RUSCHA'S BLOOD.
UNABLE TO TURN FROM THE MUTE SPECTACLE, I CAN'T TELL HOW LONG THE HORRIBLE LIMB IS, OR FROM WHERE IT AND THE HIGH THIN NOTES COME.

AND THEN IT'S GONE, SUDDENLY AS IT APPEARED.
THUD
KRAK
I THOUGHT YOU SAID THAT WAS AN *INVOCATION*? HOW'D YOU MAKE IT *ATTACK* HER WITH NO BINDING SPELL, NO CIRCLE ?
I DIDN'T.
NO TIME, MRS. MILLER.
THE BLOOD ON THE PAGE GAVE ME AN IDEA OF WHAT WE MIGHT GET, SO I PROTECTED MYSELF AND HOPED IT WOULD ATTACK HER.

WHAT IF IT CAME AFTER ME?
I WOULD'VE FOUND ANOTHER INVOCATION AND HOPED THAT THAT WOULD TAKE CARE OF RUSCHA.
AND DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT.
YOU MAY BE A PSYCHIC, BUT YOU DIDN'T WARN ME WE WERE BURGLARING DENMARK'S MOST NOTORIOUS WITCH QUEEN.
AND YOU ALMOST GAVE HER YOUR REAL NAME. NOW COME ON.
YOU NEVER KNOW HOW LONG A WITCH THIS OLD WILL STAY DEAD.
FINIS

THE KEYHOLE
"...A MACHINE THROUGH WHICH WORLDS AND DIMENSIONS FAR REMOVED FROM OUR OWN ARE RENDERED VISIBLE."
HE'S NOT SERIOUS, RIGHT? WHERE'D YOU SAY YOU GOT THIS?
I FOUND THE NOTEBOOK BEHIND THE DRAWERS OF AN OLD DESK I BOUGHT AT AN ANTIQUE STORE UPSTATE.
IT TOOK ME SIX MONTHS TO TRACK DOWN CARRINGTON'S FAMILY AND FIND OUT ABOUT THIS PLACE.
IT TOOK ANOTHER SIX TO CONVINCE CARRINGTON'S NEPHEW--HIS SISTER'S SON--TO SELL.
I DON'T THINK THE GUY'S MOTHER EVER TOLD HIM ABOUT HIS UNCLE. HE CERTAINLY DIDN'T KNOW THIS PLACE HAD BEEN SEALED SINCE THE THIRTIES.
HE JUST WANTED TO BE SURE I WASN'T GOING TO TURN IT INTO A HOUSING DEVELOPMENT.
YOU MEAN HE HAD A SUCKER ON THE LINE AND HE KNEW IT.
YEAH? WAIT 'TIL YOU SEE WHAT'S INSIDE.

HOLY...
THE HOUSE IS A WRITE-OFF, BUT AS YOU CAN SEE, CARRINGTON'S LAB IS STILL WEATHERTIGHT.
I HAD POWER RUN OUT TO THE PLACE LAST WEEK.
C'MON, TYLER-- CARRINGTON'S NOTE-BOOK...I MEAN, THE GUY WAS OBVIOUSLY CRACKED...
...YOU DON'T REALLY EXPECT THIS THING TO WORK...
ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.
RELAX. I'VE ALREADY DONE THE HARD PART. I SPENT ALL LAST WEEKEND TEARING THE THING APART AND DIAGRAMMING THE CIRCUITS.
ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS REBUILD IT, REPLACING VACUUM TUBES AND WIRE COILS WITH MODERN COMPONENTS.
I BROUGHT EVERYTHING WE NEED... INCLUDING BEER.

"...enabled me to gaze upon alien vistas never before imagined--let alone SEEN--by human kind."
YEAH, RIGHT.
"...each change in frequency brings into view new wonders to surpass those already witnessed...
"Vast plains upon which move herds of lithe beasts of the most amazing description and above which glide flocks of graceful creatures I hesitate to call birds..."
WORK. NO BEER UNTIL WE'RE FINISHED.
YEAH, YEAH.
"...and most astonishing of all, a beautiful city, peopled with gentle beings more like us than not...proof that we are not alone in the cosmos."
SNIP
THE GUY WAS BONKERS.

YOU SAW CARRINGTON'S FINAL ENTRY, RIGHT? "I MUST CLOSE THE 'KEYHOLE.' ALL EXPERIMENTS MUST END."
AND IN THE MARGIN HE WROTE--
YEAH, I SAW IT.
All matter = Energy at a different frequency.
Can process be reversed?
Check machine! Too DANGEROUS!!!

SO? WHAT'S THAT ABOUT?
IT MEANS THAT MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT AND CARRINGTON WAS A CRACKPOT. OR, MAYBE IT MEANS CARRINGTON WAS ONTO SOMETHING BIGGER THAN HE KNEW!
LET'S TURN THIS PUPPY ON AND FIND OUT!

C'MON, TYLER... "A KEYHOLE THROUGH WHICH OTHER DEMENSIONS CAN BE VIEWED..."
MOST OF THIS CIRCUITRY IS JUST A GLORIFIED TELEVISION RECEIVER.

EXCEPT FOR THIS "TUNING-FORK GIZMO," OF WHICH I WASN'T ABLE TO MAKE HIDE NOR HAIR.
I THINK CARRINGTON ACTUALLY MADE SOME OF THESE TUBES HIMSELF-- FROM SCRATCH. PRETTY RESOURCEFUL.

WHAT ABOUT FIRE DANGER?
I OWN THE PROPERTY. PLUG IT IN!
WHATEVER.

POWER'S ON.
NOTHING'S HAPPENING...
CLK
WAIT A MINUTE...I SEE SOMETHING...
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE THIS, KELLY... CARRINGTON WAS RIGHT!
"I CAN SEE THEM--THE 'HERDS OF LITHE BEASTS'...AND THE BIRD CREATURES, TOO!
CLK
"AND THE 'BEAUTIFUL CITY'...AND THE PEOPLE! IT'S--IT'S AS THOUGH I COULD REACH OUT AND TOUCH THEM!"

I'M TELLING YOU IT'S ALL THERE--JUST LIKE IN CARRINGTON'S NOTES. THIS IS UNBELIEVABLE!
LET ME LOOK!
CLIK
WAIT YOUR TUR--
:Gasp: MY GOD! SOMETHING--
WHAT?
I...DON'T KNOW. SOMETHING...IT WAS COMING TOWARD...
LET ME LOOK.
THERE'S NOTHING...JUST STARS. BIG DEAL. I COULD STEP OUTSIDE AND SEE THOSE.

LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS IF I TURN THE DIAL BACK...
CLIK
SOME-THING CUT ME...
BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE--
IT'S JUST AN IMAGE...
...UNLESS...
"YOU SAY SOMETHING, TYLER? HEY, YOU WERE RIGHT! IT IS LIKE A KEYHOLE LOOKING INTO ANOTHER WORLD!
"THIS MUST BE YOUR 'CITY.' SOMETHING HAPPENED TO IT, THOUGH..."
CLIK
"AND THE 'LITHE CREATURES'... THEY'RE ALL DEAD, TOO.
"WHAT HAPPENED TO--"

...ENERGY TO MATTER? ALL MATTER EVENTUALLY DECAYS INTO ENERGY OF LONGER AND LONGER WAVELENGTHS...
...COULD CARRINGTON'S MACHINE REVERSE THE PROCESS? BUT THAT WOULD MEAN... MY GOD...
HMMMMM
KELLY! WE'VE GOT TO SHUT DOWN THE MACHINE!
THERE'S A REASON CARRINGTON STOPPED HIS EXPERIMENTS. THE MACHINE ISN'T A "KEYHOLE" TO OTHER WORLDS. IT'S A GATEWAY FROM OTHER WORLDS...
...TO HERE...
END

Winner's Circle

HPL in DHP

My introduction to comics was at the grand old age of thirteen, when a friend and I came across a stack of comics from San Francisco's Last Gasp Eco Funnies. Derek was impressed with the nudity and the open drug use. The women were drawn so horribly I couldn't understand the attraction, and as for drugs, hey, I'd seen it all in *Nine to Five*. But the monsters—for God's sake, man, what is that?! The comic that struck me the most was *Skull #4*, the H. P. Lovecraft issue. It was this early run-in with HPL that gave me my most lasting (and arguably damaging) theory about horror in art: *Don't try making sense out of it, either as a viewer or a creator, because it's scarier when it's just plain crazy.* This is why I eject *Jacob's Ladder* every time I get to the part with the pickpocketing Santa Claus, 'cause after that they suck all the mystery out of it.

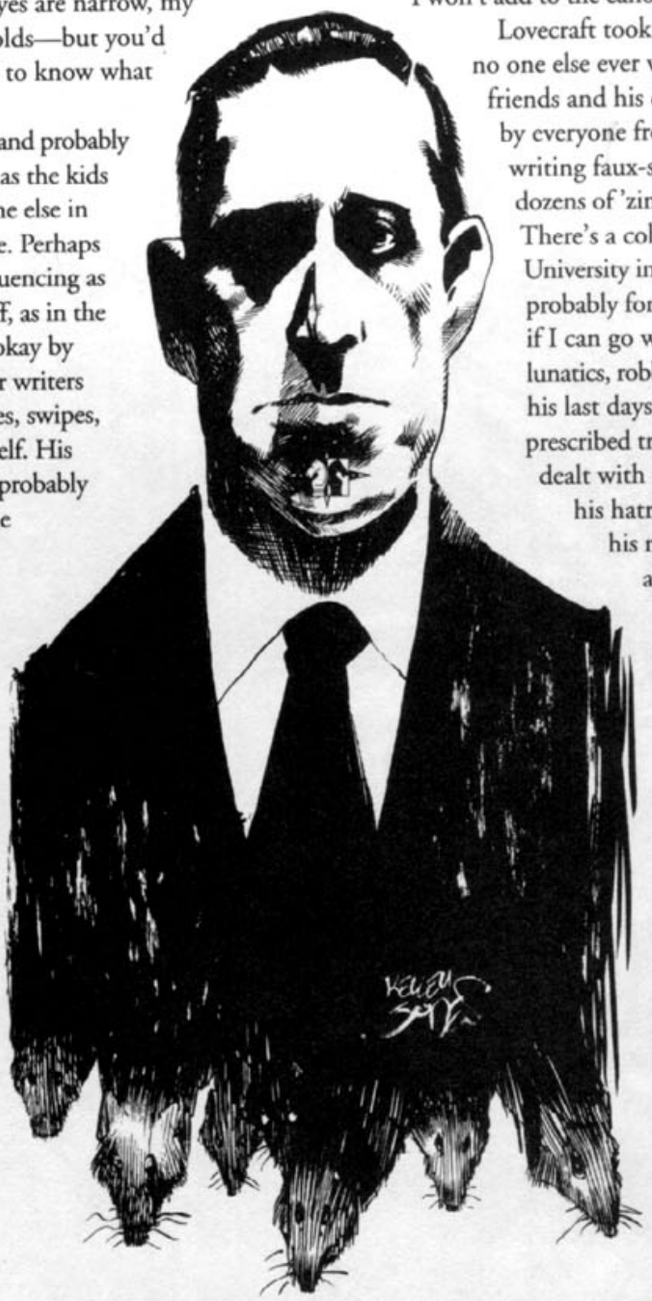
As I got deeper into the so-called C'thulhu Mythos, I realized, to my delight, that the part of Massachusetts I lived in was the setting of many of HPL's stories. He often set them in fictional towns surrounded by actual towns, allowing a reader in the know to estimate where a story takes place. I'm pretty sure my home town is the setting of "The Shadow over Innsmouth," Lovecraft's most sensible and plot-profluent story. One of my friends in college liked to say I had "the Innsmouth look." I don't—my eyes are narrow, my lips thin, and my neck without folds—but you'd have to be familiar with the story to know what I mean.

Lovecraft influenced American and probably European horror (or dark fantasy, as the kids call it these days) more than anyone else in this century, maybe more than Poe. Perhaps it's not so much a case of him influencing as it is a case of him getting ripped off, as in the comic you have here. Even that's okay by HPL. He encouraged it. The other writers in the pulps did homages, pastiches, swipes, while Lovecraft was still at it himself. His humble (self-deprecating) attitude probably encouraged this. There's no way he knew that the imitations would nurture the interest in his work which exists today—a much more widespread interest than existed in his life. But I've justified the existence of our tribute more than enough now. He got his name and face on the cover, and that's as much as the old gentleman from Providence could've expected.

In his own eyes he was pursuing the very highest form of art, and was ignored because he couldn't achieve it. He thought many of his peers, including Edgar Rice Burroughs, were hacks cranking out adventure stories with no redeeming value. How he differentiated between Burroughs and Robert E. Howard, for instance, I have no idea, but he did. The creator of Conan was his trusted and esteemed correspondent, but the Tarzan creator—whose work is probably more popular and immortal than that of either HPL or REH—got only scorn.

Lovecraft's own pursuit of high art had to do with the communication of a cosmic dread that he himself felt. His chief goal was to plant that fear in the reader, to overwhelm the reader with the awe of the unknowable universe. He definitely achieved this, but I've got my doubts about this being a legitimate aim for supposed high art.

Fortunately, HPL has other fans more faithful than myself—gentleman and ladies who appropriated his penchant for verbosity and anglicised spellings, going so far in their devotion as to believe in his fictions, when even he, by his own admission, did not. These devotees alternately insist that Lovecraft was tapping into other realms without knowing it, or that he came by this knowledge as an honest occultist, but hid it in pulp fiction to avoid persecution. He *was* a New Englander after all. While there's a history of occultists pulling that trick, of disguising their real beliefs as fiction or academic studies critical of occultism, I'm pretty sure Lovecraft didn't believe C'thulhu really lay in R'lyeh, dreaming. At least one person I respect has led me to consider that HPL wasn't quite as skeptical of the supernatural as he claimed to be, but I'm sure there are plenty of detailed essays about that on the internet already, so I won't add to the canon.



Lovecraft took his art very seriously, thinking no one else ever would outside his small circle of friends and his devoted aunts. Now he's adored by everyone from Stephen King to the guys writing faux-scholarly treatises on the web, in dozens of 'zines, and in comic-book lettercols. There's a collection of HPL's work at Brown University in his old hometown, which would probably force a grin out of the stiff old goat, if I can go way out on a limb. Revered by lunatics, robbed blind by Hollywood, he spent his last days sitting in a cold tub as a self-prescribed treatment for an illness he could've dealt with two years earlier if it wasn't for his hatred of hospitals. This was one of his many grandmotherly affectations, along with referring to his friends, most of whom were within a few years of his age, as his grandchildren, and his dear aunts as his nieces. All derision aside, I'm one of the lunatics who reveres him, who discovered him through some tattered black-and-white comics, and who rereads his better stuff everytime I start feeling a little too comfortable in my own skin. If all this comic does is lead some of you back to the source material, we'll have done our part. For those of you already familiar with HPL and Nyarlathotep and Dagon, I hope we haven't disappointed.

Scott Allie
Late of Innsmouth

STEPHEN HICKMAN'S

CTHULHU

STATUE

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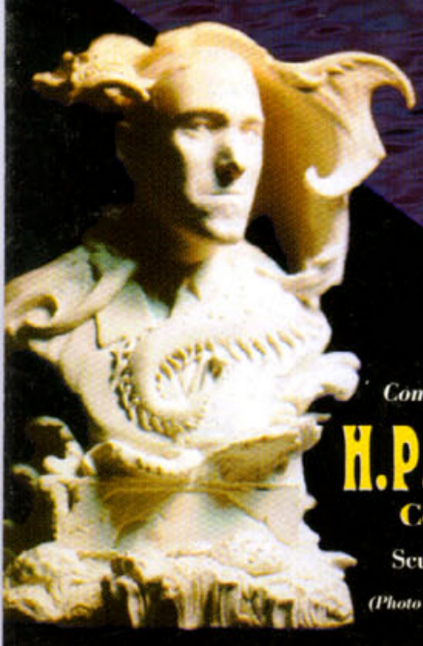

Coming soon . . .

H.P. Lovecraft

Cold-cast Bust

Sculpted by Stephen Hickman

(Photo is work in progress. Final bust will have a bronze finish.)

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